



# ISSANJI

## HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER

57 Hartford Street, San Francisco, California, 94114  
<http://members.aol.com/hszc>

(415) 863-2507

— WINTER 2000 —

Hartford Street Zen Center is a small Buddhist temple of the Soto Zen tradition situated in the heart of the Castro district. We offer a daily schedule of Zen Buddhist meditation, sitting instruction, Saturday Public lectures, and mid-day sittings for the HIV community and caregivers. HSZC was started in 1981 by a group of gay and lesbian Buddhist practitioners to serve everyone in the neighborhood. It is also called Issanji, One Mountain Temple, after our founder Issan Dorsey Roshi. The resident teacher is Zenshin Philip Whalen.

### Zen and Not-Zen

by David Prowler

*Excerpts from his Saturday talk in September. David is a lay practitioner and president of HSZC Board the past four years.*

A major tenet of Zen is the erasing of lines and opening our eyes to false distinctions. Like teacher/student, initiated/uninitiated, speaker/audience and even Zen and not-Zen. Today I would like to speak about Zen but I'm not really sure what it is. Everyone in this room has a different idea. We come here looking for wisdom but what is that really? Where do we get it? What is it used for?

A few years ago I attended a retreat at the Vedanta Society. The speaker was Zen Master Hua and the topic was wisdom. But he kept saying through his translator that he didn't have any wisdom, didn't know what it was, not sure if he'd want it — better to be like an ant. Finally somebody asked, "If somebody wanted wisdom how would they get it?" Master

Hua replied "Steal it." I took this to mean that wisdom is all around. Everybody's got some, not just monks or rabbis or popes or grownups. Babies seem to have a lot of it. And cows. What's on a cow's mind?

The questions, "who do I think I am?" and "what is and isn't Zen?" are in my mind as I sit here today. Who do you think you are? Are you going to be that person tomorrow? Is that who you were before? We're stuck on how we construct ourselves but it doesn't require much examination to see that underneath we are not these roles. Sometimes I remind myself to just walk

down the street and not think about lunch or work or sex or chores or anything. Just be doing what I'm doing. That's all. Why is it so hard?

And we're all going to die. Someone in this room is going to be next; someone will be last. It's futile to cling. Loss is a great teacher; that's what got Prince Siddhartha on the path to liberation. He was happy in his palace until he glimpsed old age, sickness, and death. The realization that nothing lasts can give a real appreciation of the fleeting nature of the things we



Bodhidharma



choose to like and dislike. I used to think it was so sad that we live and then we don't. Then I realized that what was really sad is that we are not present and then we're dead. Zazen helps me to be here for a moment before I'm gone.

Two important lessons in Buddhism are first, your self is a fiction, and second, nothing is permanent, unchanging or independent. We hear a lot about emptiness in Zen. The term refers to "empty of inherent existence" – permanence, independence, and immutability. An example: to some people a smoking chimney represents the hearth and family. But a woman I know who was in Auschwitz wrote that survivors sometimes have panic attacks when they see a smoking chimney. What is the real chimney? Can you see the chimney without a filter? How about a Picasso or a sexy person or a sunset or a person of a different color than you? Can you really see them as they are? Do you see them at all? I think Andy Warhol did a great service when he showed us the Campbell's soup can. Duchamp also was a great teacher. He'd buy common objects in stores like a bottle-drying rack or urinal and show them in galleries as art – really make people take notice.

Zen is a practice. People come here, sit on the floor and focus on the moment, on all the nuances of what's happening right now. Feeling the temperature, hearing the sounds, and watching thoughts come and go. And how do we carry Zen practice out of the meditation hall? Zen taught me not to take my work as negotiator for city land developments too seriously or personally. I kept a picture book of Pompeii and a 550 million-year-old trilobite fossil on my desk for when the going got tough. And sometimes I can even sit quietly in a room.

*No masters only you the master is you  
Wonderful, no?*

*Forget what the masters wrote truth's a razor  
Each instant sitting here you and I being here.  
Ikkyu, 15th Century*

## HSZC NEWS

**T**he roof was replaced in November. The next major project, repairing the zendo floor and foundation, will take place this spring.

**Zenshin** is finally feeling better after recent bouts of ill health and has resumed sitting zazen.

**Mark Lancaster** from SFZC has stepped in to help around the temple. He's been leading services, acting as

Doshi in evening, and working on outreach. We are grateful for his presence.

HSZC held half-day sittings on October 31<sup>st</sup> and December 5<sup>th</sup>. The next Half-day sitting is scheduled for Sunday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. Also, a Zen Workshop for Beginners led by **Mark Lancaster** will be held January 15<sup>th</sup> from 8:00 am until 2:00 pm. Please consult the online calendar at: <http://members.aol.com/hszc> for further updates.

Please extend a welcome to **Bruce Boone** who was nominated to the board to complete **George Gayuski's** term. And a deep bow to **Ixia** for providing our altar with flowers, **Jerome Chikudo** for his untiring presence and help, **Charlotte Reder** for gardening assistance, and everyone else!

**Saturday Dharma Talks** Thanks to **Kokai Roberts**, **Furyu Nancy Shroeder**, **Mark Lancaster**, **Jaku Kinst**, **Jim Wilson**, **Myo Lahey**, **Mary Mocine**, and **Barbara Kohn** for sharing their sense of practice with us.

Please attend our  
**Open House**

**Saturday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, noon to 2:00 pm**

Mark your calendar!

**Community Thrift Store** 625 Valencia St. at 17<sup>th</sup> Street. 415-861-4910. We recently received a check for \$214! Please keep your donations of old clothes, furniture and books coming. Drop off donations at the side door on Sycamore Alley, and register them to HSZC, account #155.

### **Newsletter Production**

*Donations to help cover Newsletter production and mailing costs are always appreciated!*

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Post Office delivery: Don Herald.



## Some Thoughts about Sangha

by Mark Lancaster

**W**e become Buddhists by taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Buddha and Dharma are very important, but Sangha is the living tissue of our practice. The people we practice with – the Sangha – encourage and sustain our efforts. When we go sit in the Zendo, if someone is already there and incense is burning, it helps us sit and practice more wholeheartedly.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Master, says, "Take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in ourselves." We can find the same warmth, confusion, bravery and fear that make up Sangha inside our own hearts and minds. And in the midst of that insight, our intention to practice together arises. Perhaps, we have some idea of how Buddhist practice should be – sometimes we are right and sometimes wrong – the situation changes. All we can do is make our utmost effort and be responsible. Yet, it is important to realize that we are not in charge. Sometimes, we have to give way even if we think we are right.

In his *Millenium's Edge* lectures, Jon Kabat-Zinn said, "...helping my daughter across a stream during a family outing, I said put your foot here and here." Later, he thought, how funny that his daughter's foot had to be placed exactly where he alone decided. Amongst rocks which had been there for millions of years! That only a certain way would work. He realized his daughter would find another way to ford the stream that would be perfectly fine.

The irritation we experience with friends in the Sangha is valuable. It shows us where we get stuck and the tight places in our lives. We can glimpse a way to live that is big, open, warm, and humorous. With so many rocks in the stream, there are myriad ways to cross over so that everyone has space to walk. We call this "saving all beings."



## Maitri Update

by Cecilia Tom

**D**ecember 1<sup>st</sup> was Maitri's second anniversary in our "new" home. It was also World AIDS Day, and we remembered people all over the world who suffer from this devastating disease, but who might not be fortunate to have a facility as nurturing as Maitri, and caregivers as warm and open-hearted as our staff and volunteers. Our Thanksgiving dinner the week before reminded us to be grateful as we were joined by friends and family members of our residents, and volunteers who brought flowers, decorations and food. What would we do without our volunteers? They are truly the heart of Maitri.

In September, we were blessed by an infusion of 20 new volunteers trained by the Tibetan Buddhist organization *Rigpa*. Deeply grounded in their own practice, these volunteers are marvelously adept at handling the physical and emotional intensity of working in an end-of-life care facility. In February, Maitri will conduct another volunteer training – please consider joining us!

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, we had a special fund-raising dinner at Maitri to honor donors who funded our patio. Our fund-raising dinners are an opportunity for donors to experience the healing space of Maitri and to extend their compassion with their dollars. That evening, **Traci Des Jardins**, the chef and owner of the red hot *Jardinière* restaurant, brought her wonderful sous chefs and wait staff to Maitri and served up a fabulous meal. Our new mom, **Traci Patel** (Maitri's Board President), gave birthing advice to one of the sous chefs who was pregnant. One of the guests, the former partner of a resident who died here, gave a moving speech and a generous donation. While all this was going on, a newly bereaved mother grieved on the patio, having just removed her son from life support in a nearby hospital. So candles were lit on our dining table and on the altar where our memorial book was placed. The evening was truly a confluence of life and death, grief and hope, reunion and remembrance. The greatest thing was that our residents got served *Classic Apple Tart with Green Apple Sorbet* in their rooms by one of the swankiest restaurants in town! After all, December 1<sup>st</sup> was their day. For more information about Maitri, please call (415) 558-3000.



## ZEN DISH

**Y**our letters and articles are always welcome. Next newsletter deadline is March 1<sup>st</sup>. Write HSZC, Attn. Newsletter, or call Jennifer Birkett at 415-647-0465.

### Doing What I Do

by Sozan Peter Schellin

**I** am a Buddhist monk in the Zen tradition of Suzuki-roshi, partially sighted, middle-aged queer – and like you, I suffer. The suffering is why I started treading on the “spiritual path” in the first place. Every now and then, I decide that my spiritual path needs a kick in the ass. Usually it starts out with a fantasy about some guy on the bus. My most recent experience resulted from listening to two young Algerian men discussing obligatory Muslim prayers on a streetcar from Milan – built circa 1923, orange with slippery seats and brass lamps. The guys were attractive and the situation exotic. Perfect! I was able to escape my stinking, boring life, and was soon running through the sands of Islam with Arab boys in a sweaty chase scene from the movie *Prick Up Your Ears*.

Then I caught myself. I “suffer”. You suffer. Everybody suffers. I used to think the point of the spiritual chase was basically the same as getting off in a tent or on a blanket in the hotel with *Oud* music in the background with minarets standing like erections in the desert heat. I thought the end of suffering was obvious. You want something. You get it. End of suffering. I was wrong. For twenty-five hundred years, people have said that Buddha was right. Escape and distraction don’t work. The practice I do, zazen, has a way of slowing down the process of delusion.

But “insight” doesn’t happen overnight. Gradually I allow myself to “feel” what I do and not analyze it endlessly. I used to think that the causes of my grief were outside of me, so I would play “victim”. But Buddhism is about taking responsibility for one’s self. It isn’t about explaining anything. You ask a question and it holds up a mirror. There are three possible outcomes: you get bored and look elsewhere for something more exciting. Or use meditation like a drug to dull the pain. Or allow yourself to feel how awful it is to be bored, to suffer, to be sick, lonely, or in whatever messes you happen to be in at the time.

The shock is that there’s no way out. Transcendence happens – through acceptance of boredom and suffering.

It doesn’t end in a tent after hot sex, rolling over afterwards to smoke a Lucky Strike. It ends by really suffering when you suffer, not escaping it or diverting somewhere else. For me, it’s being sight impaired, diseased and aging – looking directly at death. It sucks! Then, in the moment I’ve decided everything’s lost, a reprieve appears.

The Buddha says, “Take the Middle Way.” And you ask, “what’s that?” It’s the space between extremes. One extreme is that everything’s gonna last forever, and the other extreme is that things are fragile and gonna turn to smoke and vanish completely. The Middle Way is between all and nothing. It’s the steady, unbroken silence behind the racket your mind is making. In Nepal, they call it “the eye that never sleeps.” It’s ordinary and immediate; it’s around every day. It defies description. Priests and artists fight over who owns it. The irony is that nobody does because it’s not a thing. There’s nothing to do. Nothing happens. One day, you just stop what you do and sit down. And there you are.

## Transitions

by Kokai Roberts

*Excerpts from her Saturday lecture at HSZC. Kokai is a priest at SFZC and former HSZC Board member.*

**T**oday I would like to talk about transition because I’m going through a transition myself – I’m changing jobs. One of our practices at San Francisco Zen Center is learning to work with impermanence by changing our job every few years. Now I’m going to be Financial Director. Because of this new job I’m taking an accounting class – a whole new world with its own vocabulary and logic. I have never thought of myself as a money person or as someone who could fit easily into a financial environment. This is a challenging transition. But, we all experience transition. That is the nature of our lives.

I’d like to talk about transition from a Buddhist point of view and what that means in our daily life. The Buddhist model I find useful is the Four Noble Truths presented by Buddha in his first sermon. The First Noble Truth says there is *dukkha* or suffering. Life is unsatisfactory. The Second Noble Truth says that there is an origin for suffering, which is thirst to become; to grasp things and keep them the same and push away things we don’t like. What makes life unsatisfactory is that things are changing all the time. There is a sense of suffering produced by changes (impermanence) and conditional suffering caused by thinking of ourselves in a particular way (doctrine of no-self). The Third Noble



Truth says, there is a way to alleviate this suffering-by understanding how reality is, dispelling our delusion - developing wisdom and compassion. And the Fourth Noble Truth is the eight-fold path, which are guidelines for living our life.

So how can we use the Four Noble Truths in our lives? We can begin by asking "is there suffering here?" When faced with transition we often suffer. We all know the transition of people getting ill, losing someone we love, changing jobs. Next we are curious about the cause of that suffering. Suffering is caused by wanting things to remain the same. And with that clinging we often experience the suffering of facing a self image not flexible enough to sustain our practice. From these first two questions: is there suffering and questioning the nature of suffering, the third and forth Noble Truths naturally arise.

Most of my life, I've had an idea that I wasn't very good at math and taking an accounting class has challenged this concept. All that needs to happen is the homework. But rarely are things so simple because we bring all of our baggage and clinging to self image and desire for a certain outcome to the situation. Can I just drop the idea that I might be the problem or that the class is too hard, and just focus on the task? Transitions give us a wonderful opportunity to see preconceived ideas about who we think we are. Our suffering arises because our self image or clinging is in conflict with what is actually happening. If we can relax rather than resist then transitions become a gateway and open up our understanding. Allow information to come in to see what is happening. Then it starts to shift by itself. This is an important point, often we don't have to do anything, if we can just hang out with and observe what's happening. This willingness to be open is practicing no-self.

Keep returning to the reality that change happens. Keep your curiosity about where you get caught. Often when change happens anxiety arises, this is the nature of our lives and rather than being a problem, it is a chance to practice Buddhism. You might think, "I'm clinging to my old situation. I want it to be the same as before." But this doesn't mean "Okay I've identified it, now, I'm not going to feel these feelings anymore." We know from modern psychology it is important to have a grieving process and to be gentle with yourself during times of readjustment. Transition is not easy. Try and see what it is about. This is the compassion side of the path. Feel your pain and have it be okay. Forgive yourself for not being the most skillful person in the world. Transitions are anxiety producing, particularly if you like a certain amount of control in your life. Allow

yourself to explore and let go of preconceived ideas of who you are and how things should be.

Each time we acknowledge that we are experiencing suffering and explore how that suffering arises, we are practicing and exploring our world. We are working with the Four Noble Truths as a guide to understanding ourself and the situations we find ourselves in. Transition is a biggie and if we can bring gentleness and curiosity to the process it will allow us to open more and more possibility and happiness into difficult situations.

## Hymnus ad Patrem Sinensis

by Philip Whalen 31:viii:58 From *Memoirs of an Interglacial Age 1958-1959*, Auerhahn Press, 1960.

I praise those ancient Chinamen  
Who left me a few words  
Usually a pointless joke or a silly question  
A line of poetry drunkenly scrawled on the margin of a  
quick  
splashed picture – bug, leaf  
caricature of Teacher  
on paper held together now by little more than ink  
& their own strength brushed momentarily over it  
Their world & several others since  
Gone to hell in a handbasket, they knew it –  
Cheered as it whizzed by –  
& conked out among the busted spring rain  
cherryblossom winejars  
Happy to have saved us all.

## HSZC Temple Schedule

**H**SZC offers a traditional schedule of Zen meditation. For those new to zazen, beginner's instruction is held every Saturday morning in the zendo from 8:30-9am. Absolute beginners are also welcome to attend the Saturday morning Zen Workshops for Beginners, held every six weeks. There is a public lecture every Saturday at 10am, followed by discussion and tea. All are welcome. Please arrive 10 minutes prior to scheduled times. Beginning Zazen instruction available Monday-Friday by appointment. Call 415-863-2507.

MORNING: Monday through Friday

5:45am	Zazen
6:15am	Interval
6:20am	Zazen
6:45am	Service



EVENING: Monday through Friday

6:00pm Zazen

6:40pm Service

SATURDAY:

9:10am Zazen

10:00am Public Lecture, followed by tea and discussion. Donations to support the temple are appreciated.

*Monthly Memorial Service* for Temple founder Issan Dorsey Roshi is held on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of each month.

*Membership* Practicing members sit regularly, attend practice interviews, and contribute a suggested \$40 monthly. Supporting members contribute \$20 or more a year and receive newsletters by mail. If you can pledge even \$10 a month, this helps the fiscal health of our temple significantly. You are welcome as a member of our Sangha, and we offer you whatever support you may need in your practice.

## Groups Meeting at HSZC

*HIV Sitting Group* For those with HIV, caregivers, lovers, and friends. Meets Thursday and Friday at 10:30 am. Sitting until 11:00 am. Meditation instruction offered. Contact: (415) 863-2507.

## Schedule of Upcoming Talks and Events

Saturday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 10am Lou Hartman, SFZC priest.

Saturday, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 10am Kokai Roberts, SFZC priest and Treasurer.

Saturday, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 8am-2pm Zen Workshop for Beginners with Mark Lancaster.

Saturday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 10am Jim Wilson, Zen teacher in Sonoma of the Chogyo, Fuke and Soto Zen traditions.

Saturday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 10am Hyunoong Sunim, resident teacher of Sixth Patriarch Zen Center in Berkeley.

Sunday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 9am-3pm. Half-day Sit with Jerome Peterson..

Saturday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 10am TBA

Saturday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 10am TBA

Saturday February 19<sup>th</sup>, 10am. Michael Wenger, SFZC priest.

Saturday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 10am TBA

Saturday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 10am TBA. Open House from noon until 2pm.

Saturday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 10am Kokai Roberts, SFZC priest and Treasurer.

Saturday, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 10am Jim Wilson, Zen teacher in Sonoma of the Chogyo, Fuke and Soto Zen traditions.

Saturday March 25<sup>th</sup>, 10am Lou Hartman

Saturday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 10am Michael Wenger, SFZC priest.

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